

SECRET.

COPY NO. _____

C A B I N E T 44 (39).

CONCLUSIONS of a Meeting of the Cabinet held
at 10 Downing Street, S.W.1., on SUNDAY,
27th AUGUST, 1939, at 3. 0 p.m.

P R E S E N T.

The Right Hon. Neville Chamberlain, M.P.
Prime Minister. (In the Chair).

The Right Hon.
Sir John Simon, G.C.S.I.,
G.C.V.O., O.B.E., K.C., M.P.,
Chancellor of the Exchequer.

The Right Hon.
Viscount Runciman,
Lord President of the Council.

The Right Hon.
Sir Samuel Hoare, Bt., G.C.S.I.,
G.B.E., C.M.G., M.P., Secretary
of State for Home Affairs.

The Right Hon.
Viscount Halifax, K.G., G.C.S.I.,
G.C.I.E., Secretary of State for
Foreign Affairs.

The Right Hon.
Sir John Anderson, G.C.B.,
G.C.S.I., G.C.I.E., M.P.,
Lord Privy Seal.

The Right Hon.
Sir Thomas Inskip, C.B.E., K.C.,
M.P., Secretary of State for
Dominion Affairs.

The Most Hon.
The Marquess of Zetland, G.C.S.I.
G.C.I.E., Secretary of State for
India and Burma.

The Right Hon.
Malcolm MacDonald, M.P.,
Secretary of State for the
Colonies.

Admiral of the Fleet the Right Hon.
Lord Chatfield, G.C.B., O.M.,
K.C.M.G., C.V.O., Minister for
Co-ordination of Defence.

The Right Hon.
W.S. Morrison, M.C., K.C., M.P.,
Chancellor of the Duchy of
Lancaster.

The Right Hon.
The Earl Stanhope, K.G., D.S.O.,
M.C., First Lord of the
Admiralty.

The Right Hon.
L. Hore-Belisha, M.P.,
Secretary of State for War.

The Right Hon.
Sir Kingsley Wood, M.P.,
Secretary of State for Air.

The Right Hon.
John Colville, M.P., Secretar
of State for Scotland.

The Right Hon.
Oliver Stanley, M.C., M.P.,
President of the Board of
Trade.

The Right Hon.
The Earl De La Warr, President
of the Board of Education.

The Right Hon.
Walter Elliot, M.C., M.P.,
Minister of Health.

The Right Hon.
Ernest Brown, M.C., M.P.,
Minister of Labour.

The Right Hon.
E.L. Burgin, M.P.,
Minister without Portfolio.

The Right Hon.
Sir Reginald Dorman-Smith, M.P.,
Minister of Agriculture and
Fisheries.

The Right Hon.
Euan Wallace, M.C., M.P.,
Minister of Transport.

THE FOLLOWING WERE ALSO PRESENT:-

The Right Hon. Sir Neville Henderson, G.C.M.G.
Sir Edward Bridges, K.C.B., M.C. Secretary.

C A B I N E T 44(39).

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CONTENTS.

<u>Subject.</u>	<u>Page.</u>
<u>THE INTERNATIONAL SITUATION:</u>	
Danzig and Germany.	1.
Italy's Position.	1.
Consideration of the Draft Reply to Herr Hitler.	4.

THE INTER-
NATIONAL
SITUATION.

Danzig and
Germany.

(Previous
Reference:
Cabinet 43
(39)).

Italy's
Position.

THE PRIME MINISTER and THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS gave the Cabinet information as to certain further developments in regard to the negotiations with Germany. These particulars are recorded in the Secretary's Standard File of Cabinet Conclusions.^x

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS said that he had had a telephone message that afternoon from Count Ciano. The latter had said that he was very grateful for Sir Percy Loraine's message informing him of the communication which we had received from Herr Hitler. The Foreign Secretary said that he gathered that the Italian Government had been informed of this communication directly by Germany, but were nevertheless deeply appreciative of our attitude in keeping closely in touch with them at the present time. Count Ciano had added that Signor Mussolini was very strongly of opinion that we should not refuse to start discussions with Germany. The fact that those discussions were going on would, at any rate, gain time, and the Duce attached considerable importance to this. Count Ciano had expressed his satisfaction at co-operation with us.

THE PRIME MINISTER said that he was strongly in agreement with Count Ciano's view that it was desirable that we should work to gain time. He was also impressed by the fact that if time was given, world opinion gathered force, and that after active negotiations with a view to maintaining peace had continued for a long time, it was harder for any Government to take action which would result in war breaking out.

x. See Annex

THE FOREIGN SECRETARY said that he had received information about lunch time to the effect that opinion among the German Staff appeared to be divided at the moment and that the position in Berlin at the present time was somewhat confused. It would appear that the firm attitude that we had adopted had had a considerable effect. It was impossible to say what part Italian advice had played in the present state of affairs.

Reference was made to the fact that Herr Hitler had stated that he had made an offer of peace, and to the fact that an official statement had been made in Berlin to the effect that Herr Hitler's communication to the British Government contained proposals for a settlement of the Polish question.

THE PRIME MINISTER said that Herr Hitler's ways of thought were perhaps hardly comprehensible except to those who had had contact with him. He thought that Herr Hitler had an extraordinary habit of concentrating for a time on one matter, to the complete exclusion of everything else. At the time when his communication to this country had been prepared, his mind had been wholly concentrated on the question of relations between this country and Germany, and he had almost entirely forgotten about the Polish problem, which had been pushed out of his mind.

The Prime Minister said that he thought that this was a genuine idiosyncrasy rather than deliberate craftiness.

SIR NEVILE HENDERSON confirmed that his discussion with Herr Hitler had been all about good relations with England, and nothing was said about Poland, as to which he had observed that we must, of course, know what terms Germany proposed to Poland.

It was agreed that it would be necessary to make a communication to the Press that evening which should indicate that the reports as to the contents of Herr Hitler's communication were completely unauthorised and quite misleading. It was generally agreed that it would be better to make a communication on these lines rather than to say definitely that Herr Hitler's message did not contain the terms of a settlement of the Polish question.

Consideration of
the Draft Reply
to Herr Hitler.

THE CHANCELLOR OF THE EXCHEQUER explained that in the half hour before the Cabinet Meeting was held he had taken the opportunity to go through the draft reply with some of his colleagues and had obtained a number of comments on the earlier paragraphs which he would communicate later to the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary.

In discussion attention was drawn to the suggestion in paragraphs 4 and 5 that the Polish Government should enter into direct discussion with the German Government on the differences between them, and in particular on the minorities question. In this connection attention was drawn to Telegram No. 575 from Paris reporting that M. Bonnet had heard by telephone from the French Ambassador in Berlin that Herr Hitler had replied in the negative to M. Daladier's proposal that Germany and Poland should begin negotiations. Reference was also made to a statement on the tape that Herr Hitler (or Herr von Ribbentrop) had asked M. Lipski to see him and that the latter had refused. It was agreed that this point would need to be cleared up before the draft of these two paragraphs was finally agreed.

Another point made in regard to the draft reply was that it would be desirable to include in it some rather more specific suggestions as to the action to be taken in the immediate future, to relieve tension between Germany and Poland.

Since, according to present plans Sir Neville Henderson would not return to Berlin until the following day, it was agreed that it was undesirable to attempt to settle the terms of the draft finally at the present meeting.

It was also agreed that Cabinet Ministers should send to the Chancellor of the Exchequer that evening their comments on the revised draft reply.

Some discussion took place whether the proposal that Sir Neville Henderson should not return to Germany until the next day involved any risk. After discussion it was generally agreed that, in the light of the suggestions which had reached us from various quarters, the right course was that Sir Neville should not return to Germany until Monday, 28th August. At the same time it was felt that it would be undesirable to allow room for undue speculation as to the date of Sir Neville Henderson's return and that a communique should be issued to the Press that evening explaining that the reply to Herr Hitler's communication was being carefully considered, and that it was expected that Sir Neville would return to Germany tomorrow, 28th August, taking the Government's reply with him.

This was agreed to.

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR WAR said that suggestions were being made to the effect that the Polish Corridor and Polish rights in Danzig should be made the subject of a general international guarantee. If an international guarantee was given to Poland and she became dependent upon that for her security rather than upon the guarantee of this country and France, Poland would no longer be in a position to afford us any reciprocal help. We should lose our hold on the East, and an attack upon the West by Germany would be facilitated. The Secretary of State thought it was of the utmost importance that this aspect of the matter should be borne in mind.

It was agreed that a meeting of the Cabinet should be held on Monday, 28th August, at 12 noon at which the final draft of the reply to Herr Hitler would be considered.

The Cabinet

- (1) took note of the statement made by the Foreign Secretary.
- (2) invited the Foreign Secretary to arrange the issue of a communique to the Press that evening on the lines agreed by the Cabinet.
- (3) agreed that any comments on the revised draft reply should be sent to the Chancellor of the Exchequer that evening.
- (4) agreed to give further consideration to the revised draft reply at a meeting of the Cabinet to be held on Monday, 28th August, at 12 noon.

Richmond Terrace, S.W.1.

27th August, 1939.

ANNEX

- MOST SECRET -

(The following notes record what was said at the Cabinet Meeting held on the 27th August (Cabinet 44 (39)) relating to Mr "D", the intermediary. These notes cover statements made at intervals throughout the Meeting.)

At the outset of the Meeting THE PRIME MINISTER asked the Foreign Secretary to inform his colleagues as to what had taken place through the negotiations carried on by Mr "D".

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS reminded his colleagues that at the previous Meeting he had informed them that he had received a message from a neutral who was in touch with Field Marshal Goering and who was returning to Germany on 26th August. He had consulted the Prime Minister, and had jotted down on paper a suitable reply to send to Field Marshal Goering through Mr "D". They had thought that it was essential to gain time, and they had asked Mr "D" to inform the Field Marshal that we wanted to see a settlement reached, and that we would give Herr Hitler's communication the most careful consideration. He had added that we were not clear as to what Herr Hitler's letter meant in certain important particulars, as to which no doubt Sir Neville Henderson would advise. Meantime it was essential that the position on the frontiers and in regard to minorities should be quietened down. We would exercise our influence on the Poles, and we hoped that Field Marshal Goering would do what he could to exercise a restraining influence on the other side.

About midnight on Saturday/Sunday, a telephone message had been received from Mr "D" that he had seen the Field Marshal, who was pleased with the message. At the outset the Germans had been shocked at the signing

of the Polish Treaty on the 25th August, but now, after the receipt of this message, they felt that there was no immediate urgency for Sir Neville Henderson's return. Mr "D" had said that he was returning that morning with a message from Herr Hitler and Field Marshal Goering. He had reached Croydon at 2.30, and had ^{brought with him} ~~made~~ a short record of his interview with Herr Hitler and Field Marshal Goering.

The Foreign Secretary read this record to the Cabinet. The record of the interview seemed to make it clear that Field Marshal Goering had definitely re-established his influence with Herr Hitler. It was also evident that Mr "D" had been left with the impression that Herr Hitler had made definite peace proposals in regard to Danzig and the Corridor. Herr Hitler had said that he was very anxious to meet two or three British representatives, who could speak German fluently, in order to discuss terms with them.

The Foreign Secretary said that he and the Prime Minister had made it clear to Mr "D" that it was not practicable for us to start discussions with Germany on a number of diverse topics affecting Anglo-German relations, while all the time there was the possibility that Germany might any day invade Poland and that we should be at war with Germany. He had also impressed upon him that it was necessary that there should be direct discussions between Germany and Poland, and that for this purpose confidence was wanted. For the rest, we were anxious to reach a settlement with Germany. It had been arranged that a series of rough notes, making some of these essential points, should be prepared by Sir Alexander Cadogan, and, after approval by the Prime Minister and himself, should be handed to Mr "D", who was to return with them to Germany that night. The object

of this procedure was that Mr "D" might act as a fore-runner and prepare the way for the full British reply which would be sent by Sir Neville Henderson on the ensuing day.

Details were then given of Mr "D". He was a Swede who had lived in this country for ten years but had previously lived in Germany. He was on terms of close personal friendship with Field Marshal Goering, who frequently stayed with him in Sweden. Some weeks ago he had seen the Field Marshal and had persuaded him that it was a great misfortune that he did not understand the British point of view. As a result it had been arranged that six British men of good standing should meet Field Marshal Goering and talk to him frankly. This had been done about the 10th August.

THE PRIME MINISTER said that he had not seen Mr "D" until that morning. He was not a man who came very quickly to the point, and he often spent time in discussing unimportant details. He was not, perhaps, a man who saw fundamental points quickly. Nevertheless, he was a useful person, since he had the confidence of Field Marshal Goering.

The Prime Minister then gave details of certain points which had emerged in the discussion between Mr "D" and Herr Hitler and Field Marshal Goering. A good deal of the talk was concerned with the question whether some English person who could talk German should go over at once to discuss matters with representatives of the German Government. The matters which it was suggested should be discussed were Anglo-German questions. Mr "D" had asked how the Polish question was to be settled. Herr Hitler had thought that this question should best be discussed between the British Government and Poland, but Mr "D" had seen that in practice this

was impossible. Mr "D" had answered a question which Herr Hitler had put to him, as to the reasons for the difficulties between this country and Germany, by saying that this country had no confidence in Herr Hitler.

The Prime Minister said that he had asked Mr "D" whether he had any indication of the terms which Herr Hitler would ask for a settlement of the Polish question. Mr "D" had said No; but added that he thought that Herr Hitler would wish Danzig to return to the Reich, but that he would give the Poles a free port. He thought also that Herr Hitler would ask for the return of the Corridor to Germany, but that a new Polish corridor to Gdynia would be granted.

The Prime Minister said that he had told Mr "D" that if these were the German terms he could see no prospect of a settlement, and that the Poles would fight rather than surrender the Corridor. He thought that the most the Poles could concede would be Danzig, subject to the retention of special Polish rights and extra-territorial roads for Germany across the Corridor, subject to an international guarantee.

The Prime Minister called attention to the fact that Herr Hitler had made no reference to the proposal in his (the Prime Minister's) letter for an international guarantee by all the Powers of the settlement to be reached in regard to Poland. He thought it was quite possible that Herr Hitler had never noticed this reference, as his mind was concentrated on other matters. The only way to get Herr Hitler to understand things was that they should be discussed with him by somebody who was accustomed to talk to him, such as Field Marshal Goering. The use of Mr "D" was that he was an intermediary who could talk to the Field Marshal, who, in his turn, could put points to Herr Hitler. He agreed

that the points which Mr "D" was to put to Field Marshal Goering and Herr Hitler should be confined to a few simple points, such as that we could not deal with Anglo-German relations until the Polish question had been settled; that in our view it was essential that direct negotiations should take place between Germany and Poland, and that any agreement should be guaranteed by the Great Powers; and that while we desired a settlement with Germany, we would certainly not fail to carry out our obligations to Poland. He thought that it was desirable that the despatch of our reply to Herr Hitler should be deferred until the ensuing day, when Mr "D" would fly back to this country.

In reply to the Home Secretary, THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS said that the Polish Government did not know about Mr "D". Although he appreciated the risk of suspicion arising if negotiations were carried on through a secret intermediary without the knowledge of the Polish Government, he thought it was essential to maintain absolute secrecy as to these negotiations.

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR AIR called attention to the fact that Field Marshal Goering had said that although Herr Hitler was a very great man, he was not a very great negotiator. He thought that Field Marshal Goering would like to be entrusted with the negotiation of a settlement.

SIR NEVILE HENDERSON agreed that when the negotiations were near the point of agreement, Field Marshal Goering would like to come to London to deal with the concluding stages.

Later in the Meeting THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS said that Mr "D" had given him to understand that he thought that it was now appreciated in Berlin that if Germany invaded Poland we should go

to war with Germany. This had not been the case three months ago.

The Foreign Secretary asked the Prime Minister if he expected to obtain any new material from Mr "D" after his return the next day.

THE PRIME MINISTER replied in the negative. Nevertheless, he thought it would be wise to wait and see whether Mr "D" made any report. If not, the reply which had been prepared should be sent.

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS said that he was rather afraid that the issue might be somewhat confused as the result of these rather informal and secret communications. He thought it was desirable to make it clear that Mr "D", when he went to Berlin tonight, went not to carry our answer, but rather to prepare the way for our main communication.

THE PRIME MINISTER said that he agreed generally with this course.

The Cabinet took note of the above statements in regard to the informal negotiations with the German Government with Mr "D" as an intermediary.

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Richmond Terrace, S.W.1,

27th August, 1939.